NO. XXVI. PRICE 1s.

TOM BURKE

OF "OURS."

No. 13.

EDITED BY

HARRY LORREQUER

ILLUSTRATED BY PHIZ

WILLIAM CURRY, JUN. AND CO., SACKVILLE-STREET, DUBLIN.

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TOM BURKE OF "OURS."

CHAPTER L.

A "MAITRE D'ARMES."

THE day after the battle of Austerlitz, the Prince of Lichtenstein arrived in our camp, with, as it was rumoured, proposals for a peace. The negociations, whatever they were, were strictly secret, not even the marshals themselves being admitted to Napoleon's confidence on this occasion. Soon after mid-day, a great body of the guard who had been in reserve the previous day, were drawn up in order of battle, presenting an array of several thousand men, whose dress, look, and equipment—fresh as if on parade before the Tuileries—could not fail to strike the Austrian envoy with amazement. Every thing that could indicate the appearance of suffering, or even fatigue, among the troops, was sedulously kept out of view. Such of the cavalry regiments as suffered least in the battle, were under arms, while the generals of division received orders to have their respective staffs fully equipped and mounted, as if on a day of review. It was late in the afternoon when the word was passed along the lines to stand to arms; and the moment after, a calêche, drawn by six horses, passed in full gallop, and took the road towards Austerlitz. The return of the Austrian envoy set a thousand conjectures in motion, and all were eager to find out what had been the result of his mission.

"We must soon learn it all," said an old colonel of artillery near me; "if the game be war, we shall be called up to assist Davoust's movement on Göding—the Russians have but one line of retreat, and that is already in our possession."

"I cannot for the life of me understand the Emperor's inaction," said a younger officer—"here we remain just as if nothing had been done. One would suppose that a Russian army stood in full force before us, and that we had not gained a tremendous battle."

"Depend on it, Auguste," said the old officer, smiling, "his Majesty is not the man to let slip his golden opportunities. If we don't advance, it is because it is safer to remain where we are."

"Safer than pursue a flying enemy?"

"Even so—it is not Russia, nor Austria, we have in the field against us, but Europe—the world."

"With all my heart," retorted the other boldly; "nor do I think the odds unfair—all I would ask is—the General Bonaparte of Cairo or Marengo, and not the purple-clad Emperor of the Tuileries."

"It is not while the plain is yet reeking with the blood of Austerlitz, that such a reproach should be spoken," said I, indignantly; "never was Bonaparte greater than Napoleon."

"Monsieur has served in Egypt," said the young man contemptuously, while he measured me from head to foot.

"Would that I had! would that I could give whatever years I may have before me, for those whose every day shall live in history."

"You are right, young man," said the old colonel, "they were glorious times, and a worthy prelude to the greatness that followed them."

"A bright promise of the future—never to come," rejoined the younger, with a flash of anger on his cheek.

"*Parbleu*, sir, you speak boldly," said a harsh, low voice, from behind. We turned—it was Napoleon, dressed in a grey coat, all covered with fur, and looking like one of the couriers of the army. "I did not know my measures were so freely canvassed as I find them. Who are you, sir?"

"Legrange, Sire, Chef d'escadron of the 2nd voltigeurs," said the young man, trembling from head to foot, while he uncovered his head, and stood cap in hand before him.

"Since when, sir, have I called you into my counsels, and asked your advice, or what is it in your position which entitles you to question one in mine? Duroc, come here—your sword, sir."

The young man let fall his shako from his hand, and laid it on his sword-hilt—"Ah!" cried the Emperor, suddenly—"what became of your right arm?"

"I left it at Aboukir, sire."

Napoleon muttered something between his teeth—then added aloud—"Come, sir, you are not the first whose hand has saved his head: return to your duty, and—mark me! be satisfied with doing yours, and leave me to mine. And you, sir," said he, turning towards me and using the same harsh tone of voice, "I should know your face."

"Lieutenant Burke of the 8th hussars."

"Ah! I remember,—the Chouanist. So, sir, it seems that I stand somewhat higher in your esteem than when you kept company with Messieurs Georges and Pichegru, eh?"

"No, sire,—your majesty ever occupied the first place in my admiration and devotion."

"Sacristi! then, you took a strange way to show it, when first I had the pleasure of your acquaintance. You are on General St. Hilaire's staff?"

"General D'Auvergne's, sire."

"True! D'Auvergne, a word with you:"—he turned and whispered something to the old General, who during the whole colloquy stood at his back, anxious, but not daring to interpose a word.

"Well, well," said Napoleon in a voice of much kinder accent;—"I

am satisfied, your General, sir, reports favourably of your zeal and capacity. I do not desire to let your former conduct prove any bar to your advancement, and on his recommendation, of which I trust you may prove yourself worthy, I name you to a troop in your own regiment."

"And still to serve on my staff?" said the General, half questioning the Emperor.

"As you wish it, D'Auvergne." With that he moved forward ere I could do more than express my gratitude by a respectful bow.

"I told you, Burke, the time would come for this," said D'Auvergne, as he pressed my hand warmly, and followed the cortége of the Emperor.

Hitherto I had lived an almost isolated life: my staff duties had so separated me from my brother officers, that I only knew them by name; while the other aide-de-camps of the General were men much older than myself, and with none of them had I formed any intimacy whatever. It was not without a sense of this loneliness that I now thought over my promotion. The absence of those who sympathise with our moments of joy and sorrow, reduces our enjoyment to a narrow limit indeed. The only one of all I knew who would really have felt happy in my advancement, was poor Pioche. He was beyond every thought of pleasure or grief. Thus reflecting, I turned towards my quarters at Brunn. It was evening—the watch-fires were lighted, and round them sat groups of soldiers at their supper, chatting away pleasantly, and recounting the events of the battle. Many had been slightly wounded, and by their bandaged foreheads, and disabled arms, claimed a marked pre-eminence above the rest. A straw bivouac, with its great blazing fire in front, would denote some officer's quarters, and here were generally some eight or ten assembled, while the savoury odour of some smoking dish, and the merry laughter, proclaimed that feasting was not excluded from the life of a campaign.

As I passed one of these, I heard the tones of a voice, which, well known, had somehow not been heard by me for many a day before. Who could it be? I listened, but in vain—I asked myself whose was it—I dismounted, and leading my horse by the bridle, passed before the hut; the strong light of the blazing wood lit up the interior, and showed me a party of about a dozen officers, seated and lying on a heap of straw, occupied in discussing a supper, which, however wanting in all the elegancies of table equipment, even where I stood, had a most appetising odour; various drinking vessels—some of them silver—passed from hand to hand rapidly, and the clinking of cups proclaimed, that although of different regiments—as I saw they were—a kindly feeling united them.

"Well, François," said the same voice, whose accents were so familiar to me, without my being able to say why—"Well, François, you have not told us how it happened."

"Easily enough," said another; "he broke my blade in his back, and gave point afterwards, and ran me through the chest." It was the 'Maitre d'armes' of the fourth, my old antagonist, who said this, and I drew near to hear the remainder. "You could not call the thing unfair," continued he; "but, after all, no one ever heard of such a '*passe*.'"

"I could have told you of it though," rejoined the other, "for I

remember once, in the fencing school at the Polytechnique, I saw him catch his antagonist's blade in his sleeve, and when he had it secure, snap it across, and then thrust home with his own. *Parbleu*, he lost a coat by it, and I believe, at the time, poor fellow, he could ill spare it."

This story, which was told of myself, was an incident which occurred in a school duel, and was only known to two or three others; and again was I puzzled, to think, which of my former companions the speaker could be. My curiosity was now stronger than aught else, and so, affecting to seek a light for my cigar, I approached the blaze.

"Hallo, comrade, a cup of wine with you," cried out a voice from within, "Melniker is no bad drinking——"

"When Chambertin can't be had," said another, handing me a goblet of red wine.

"*Par St. Denis!* it's the very man himself," shouted a third. "Why, Burke, my old comrade, do you forget Tascher?"

"What!" said I, in amazement, turning from one to the other of the moustached faces, and unable to discover my former friend, while they laughed loud, and long, at my embarrassment.

"Make way for him there—make way, lads. Come, Burke, here's your place," said he, stretching out his hand and pressing me down beside him on the straw. "So you did not remember me?"

In truth, there was enough of change in his appearance, since last I saw him, to warrant my forgetfulness. A dark bushy beard, worn cuirassier fashion, around the mouth and high on the cheeks, almost concealed his face; while in figure he had grown both taller and stouter.

"Art colonel of the 8th regiment?" said he, laughingly; "you know, I promised you were to be, when we were to meet again."

"No: but if I mistake not," said a hussar officer opposite, "Monsieur is in the way to become so. Were you not named to a troop, about half an hour ago, by the Emperor himself?"

"Yes!" said I, with an effort to suppress my pride.

"*Diantre bleu!*" exclaimed Tascher, "what good fortune you always have. I wish you joy of it, with all my heart. I say, comrades, let us drown his commission for him."

"Agreed—agreed," cried they all in a breath, "François will make us a bowl of punch for the occasion."

"Most willingly," said the little 'Maitre d'armes;' "Monsieur le Capitaine, I am sure, bears me no ill-will for our little affair. I thought not," added he, seizing my hand in both his: "*Ma foi!* you spoiled my *tierce* for me—I shall never be the same man again. Now, gentlemen, pass down the brandy, and let the man with most credit go seek for sugar at the canteen."

While François commenced his operations, Tascher proceeded to recount to me the miserable life he had spent in garrison towns, till the outbreak of the campaign had called him on active service.

"It was no use that I asked the Empress to intercede for me, and get me appointed to another regiment; being the nephew of Napoleon, seemed to set a complete bar to my advancement. Even now,"

said he, "my name has been sent forward by my colonel, for promotion, and I wager you fifty Naps, I shall be passed over."

"And what if you be?" said a huge, heavy-browed major, beside him—"What great hardship is it, to be a lieutenant in the cuirassiers at two and twenty? I was a sergeant ten years later."

"Ay, *parbleu!*" cried another, "I won my epaulettes at Cairo, when three officers were reported living, in a whole regiment."

"To be sure," said François, looking up from his operation of lemon squeezing—"here am I, a Maitre d'armes, after twenty-six years' service; and there's Davoust, who never could stand before me, he's a general of brigade."

The whole party laughed aloud at the grievances of Maitre François, whose seriousness on the subject was perfectly real.

"Ah! you may laugh," said he, half in pique; "but what a mere accident can determine a man's fortune in life. Would Junot there be a major-general to-day, if he did not measure six feet without his boots? We were at school together, and, *ma foi!* he was always at the bottom of the class."

"And so, François, it was your size then that stopped your promotion?"

"Of course it was. When a man is but five feet—with high heels too—he can only be advanced as a Maitre d'armes. *Parbleu!* what should I be now, if I had only grown a little taller."

"It is all better as it is," growled out an old captain, between the puffs of his meerschaum; "if thou wert an inch bigger, there would be no living in the same brigade with thee."

"For all that," rejoined Maitre François, "I have put many a pretty fellow his full length on the grass."

"How many duels, François, did you tell us the other evening, that you fought in the 22nd?"

"Seventy-eight!" said the little man—"not to speak of two affairs, which, I am ashamed to confess, were with the broad-sword; but they were fellows from Alsace, and they knew no better."

"*Tonnerre de ciel!*" cried the major, "a little devil like that is a perfect plague in a regiment. I remember, we had a fellow called Piccotin——"

"Ah! Piccotin—poor Piccotin—we were foster-brothers," interrupted François, "we were both from Chalons-sur-Marne."

"Egad, I'd have sworn you were," rejoined the major. "One might have thought ye were twins."

"People often said so," responded François, with as much composure as though a compliment had been intended—"We both had the same coloured hair and eyes—the same military air—and gave the '*passe en tierce*' always outside the guard, exactly in the same way."

"What became of Piccotin?" asked the major, "he left us at Lyons."

"You never heard, then, what became of him?"

"No: we knew he joined the *Chasséurs a Pied*."

"I can tell you, then," said François, "no one knows better. I

parted from Piccotin when we were ordered to Egypt. We did our best to obtain service in the same brigade, for we were like brothers, but we could not manage it, and so, with sad hearts, we separated; he, to return to France, I, to sail for Alexandria. This was in the spring of 1798, or, as we called it, the year Six of the Republic. For three years we never met; but when the eighth demi-brigade returned from Egypt, we went into garrison at Bayonne, and the first man I saw on the ramparts was Piccotin himself. There was no mistaking him: you know the way he had of walking with a long stride, rising on his instep at every step, squaring his elbows, and turning his head from side to side, just to see if any one was pleased to smile, or even so much as to look closely at him. Ah! *ma foi*! little Piccotin knew how to treat such as well as any one. Methinks I see him approaching his man with a slide and a bow, and then taking off his cap, I hear him say in his mildest tone—'Monsieur assuredly did not intend that stare and that grimace for me—I know I must have deceived myself; monsieur is only a fool, he never meant to be impertinent.' Then, *parbleu*, what a storm would come on, and how cool was Piccotin the whole time—how scrupulously timid he would be of misspelling the gentleman's name, or misplacing an accent over it—how delicately he would inquire his address, as if the curiosity was only pardonable; and then with what courtesy he would take his leave, retiring half-a-dozen paces before he ventured to turn his back on the man he was determined to kill next morning."

"Quite true—perfectly true, François," said the major, "Piccotin did the thing with the most admirable temper and good-breeding."

"That was the tone of Chalons, when we were both boys," said François, proudly; "he and I were reared together." He finished a bumper of wine as he made this satisfactory explanation, and looked round at the company with the air of a conqueror.

"Piccotin saw me, as quickly as I perceived him, and the minute after we were in each other's arms. 'Ah! *mon cher*, how many?' said he to me, as soon as the first burst of enthusiasm subsided.

"'Only eighteen,' said I, sadly; 'but two were Mamelukes of the guard.'

"'Thou wert ever fortunate, François,' he replied, wiping his eyes with emotion; 'I have never pinked any but Christians.'

"'Come—come,' said I, 'don't be down-hearted—good times are coming. They say *le petit Caporal* will have us in England soon.'

"'Mayhap,' said he, sorrowfully, for he could not get over my Turks. Well, in order to cheer him up a little, I proposed that we should go and sup together at the 'Grenadier Rouge,' and away we went accordingly.

"It would amuse you, perhaps," said Maitre François, "were I to tell some of the stories we related to each other that night. We both had had our share of adventure since we met, and some droll ones among the number. However, that is not the question at present. We sat late—so late, that they came to close the *café* at last, and we were obliged to depart. You know the 'Grenadier Rouge,'—don't you?"

"Yes, I know it well," replied the major; "it's over the glacis, about a mile outside the barrier."

"Just so; and there's a pleasant walk across the glacis to the gate. As Piccotin and I set out together on our way to the town, the night was calm and mild: a soft moonlight shed a silvery tint over every object, and left the stately poplars to throw a still longer shadow on the smooth grass. For some time we walked along without speaking: the silence of the night, the fragrant air, the mellow light, were all soft and tranquillizing influences, and we each sank into his own reflections.

"When we reached the middle of the plain—you know the spot, I'm sure—there's a little bronze fountain, with four cedars round it"—The major nodded, and he resumed: "Piccotin came to a sudden halt, and seizing my hand in both of his, said—'François, canst thou guess what I'm thinking of?'

"I looked at him, and I looked around me, and after a few seconds' pause, I answered—'Yes, Piccotin, I know it, it is a lovely spot.'

"'Never was any thing like it!' cried he in a rapture; 'look at the turf, smooth as velvet, and yet soft to the foot; see the trees, how they fall back to give the light admittance; and there, that little fountain, if one felt thirsty—eh!—what say you?'

"'Agreed,' said I, 'grasping him by both hands; for this once—once only, Piccotin.'

"'Only once, François; a few passes, and no more.'

"'Just so—the first touch.'

"'Exactly—the first touch,' said he, as, taking off his cloak, and folding it neatly, he laid it on the grass.

"It was a strange thing, but in all our lives, from earliest boyhood up, we never had measured swords together, and though we were both 'Maitre d'armes,' we never crossed blades, even in jest. Often and often had our comrades pitted us against each other, and laid wagers on the result, but we never would consent to meet—I cannot say why. It was not fear—I know not how to account for it, but such was the fact.

"'What blade do you wear, François,' said he, approaching me, as I arranged my jacket and vest, with my cap, on the ground.

"'A Rouen steel,' said I: 'too limber for most men, but I am so accustomed to it, I prefer it.'

"'Ah! a pretty weapon, indeed,' said he, drawing it from the scabbard, and making one or two passes with it against an elder trunk. 'Was this the blade you had with you in Egypt?'

"'Yes, I have worn none other for eight years.'

"'Ah! *ma foi*, those Mamelukes—how I envy you, those Mamelukes,' he muttered to himself, as he walked back to his place.

"'Move a little—a very little to the left—there's a shadow from that tree—can you see me well?' said I.

"'Perfectly—are you ready? Well—*en garde!*'

"Piccotin's forte, I soon saw, lay in the long meditated attack, where each movement was part of an artfully devised series; and I perceived that he suffered his adversary to gain several trifling advantages, by

way of giving him a false confidence, biding his own time to pay off the scores. In this description of fence he was more than my equal. *My* strength was in the skirmishing passages, where most men lunge at random; then, no matter how confused the rally, I was as cool as in the salute.

"For some time I permitted him to play his game out; and certainly nothing could be more beautiful than his passes over the hilt. Twice he planted his point within an inch of my bosom; and nothing but a spring backwards would have saved me.

"At length, after a long-contested struggle, he made a feint within, and then without the guard, and succeeded in touching my sword-arm, above the wrist.

"'A touch, I believe,' said he.

"'A mere nothing,' said I; for although I felt the blood running down my sleeve, and oozing between my fingers, I was annoyed to think he had made the first hit.

"'Ah, François, these Mamelukes were not of the 'premiere force,' after all. I have only been jesting all this time—see here.' With that he closed on me, in a very different style from his former attack. Pushing and parrying with the rapidity of lightning, he evinced a skill in 'skirmish' I did not believe him possessed of. In this, however, I was his master, and in a few seconds gave him my point sharply, but not deeply, in the shoulder.

"Instead of dropping his weapon when he received mine, he returned the thrust. I parried it, and touched him again, a little lower down. He winced this time, and muttered something I could not catch. 'You shall have it now,' said he, aloud—'I owe you this—and this.' True to his word, he twice pierced me in the back, outside the guard. Encouraged by success, he again closed on me, while I, piqued by his last assault, advanced to meet him.

"Our tempers were both excited; but his far more than mine. The struggle was a severe one. Three several times his blade passed between my arm and my body; and, at last, after a desperate rally, he dropped on one knee, and gave me the point here, beneath the chest. Before he could extricate his blade, I plunged mine into his chest, and pushed till I heard the hilt come clink against his ribs. The blood spurted upwards, over my face and breast, as he fell backwards. I wiped it hurriedly from my eyes, and bent over him. He gave a shudder and a little faint moan, and all was still.

"You killed him?" cried out three or four of us together.

"*Ma foi!* Yes." The coup was mortal—he never stirred after.

"As for me," continued François, "I surrendered myself a prisoner to the officer on guard at the gate. I was tried ten days after by a military commission, and acquitted. My own evidence was my accusation, and my defence."

"*Ventre bleu*—had I been on the court-martial, you had not been here to tell the story," said the old major, as his face became almost purple with passion.

"Nonsense," said Tascher, jeeringly; "what signifies a Maitre d'armes the more, or the less."

"Monsieur will probably explain himself," said François, with one of his cold smiles of excessive deference.

"It is exactly what I mean to do, François."

"Come, sirs, none of this," broke in the major. "Lieutenant Tascher, you may not fancy being placed under an arrest, when the enemy is in the field. Master François, do you forget the sentence of a court-martial is hanging over your head, for an affair at Elchingen, where you insulted a young officer of the hussars?"

"In that case, I must be permitted to say that Maitre François conducted himself like a man of honour," said I.

"*Parbleu*—and got the worst of it besides," cried he, placing his hand on his hip. The tone of his voice, as he said this, and the grimace he made, restored the party once more to good humour, and we chatted away pleasantly till day was breaking.

As Tascher strolled along with me towards my quarters, I was rejoiced to discover that he had never heard of my name as being mixed up in the Chouan conspiracy; nor was he aware with how little reason he believed me to be favoured by fortune.

I received, however, all his congratulations, without any desire to undeceive him. Already had I learned the worldly lesson, that while friends cling closer in adversity, your mere acquaintance deems your popularity your greatest merit; and I at length perceived, that however ungenial, in many respects, the companionship, the life of isolation I led had rendered me suspected by others, and in a career, too, where frankness was considered the first of virtues.

I assented at once, with pleasure, to the prospect of our meeting frequently while in camp. My own regiment had joined Davoust's corps, and I was glad to have the society of some others of my own age, if only to wean myself from my habits of solitude. While I formed these plans for the future, I little anticipated what events were in store for me, nor how soon I should be thrown among scenes and people totally different from those with which I had ever mixed before.

"You mess with us, then, Burke—that's agreed," said Tascher; "They're excellent fellows, these cuirassiers of ours, and I know you'll like them."

With this promise we parted, hoping to meet on the morrow.

CHAPTER LI.

THE MILL ON THE HOLLITSCH ROAD.

At an early hour on the morning of the 4th, came orders for the "Garde à Cheval," to hold themselves in readiness, with two squadrons of the carabineers, on the road to Hollitsch; part of this force being under the command of General D'Auvergne. We found ourselves fully equipped and in waiting soon after eight o'clock. From the "tenue," and appearance of the troops, it was evident that no measure of active service was contemplated. Yet, if a review were intended, we could not guess why so small a force had been selected. As usual on such occasions, many conjectures were hazarded, and a hundred explanations passed current—one scarcely a whit better than the other—when at last we perceived a peloton of dragoons advancing towards us, at a brisk trot.

The word was passed, to close up, and draw swords—and scarcely was it obeyed, when the staff of the Emperor came up. They were all in the full blaze of their gala uniforms, brilliant with crosses and decorations. Napoleon alone wore the simple costume of the "chasseurs" of the "garde," with the decoration of the legion; but his proud look and his flashing eye, made him conspicuous above them all. He was mounted on his favourite charger, "Marengo," and seemed to enjoy the high spirit of the mettled animal, as he tossed his long mane about, and lashed his sides with his great silken tail.

As the cortége passed, we closed up the rear, and followed at a sharp pace, more than ever puzzled to divine what was going forward. After about two hours' riding, during which we never drew bridle, we saw a party of staff officers in front, who, saluting the Emperor, joined the cortége. At the same instant General D'Auvergne passed close beside me, and whispered in my ear—"Bernadotte has just come up, and been most coldly received." I wished to ask him, what was the object of the whole movement, but he was gone before I could do so. In less than a quarter of an hour afterwards, we left the high road, and entered upon a large plain, where the only object I could perceive was an old mill, ruined and dilapidated. Towards this the imperial staff rode forward, while the peloton in front wheeled about, and rode to the rear of our squadrons. The next moment we were halted, and drawn up in order of battle. While these movements were going forward, I remarked, that the Emperor had dismounted from his horse, and dismissed his staff, all save Marshal Berthier, who stood at a little distance from him. Several dismounted dragoons were employed in lighting two immense fires, a process which Napoleon appeared to watch with great interest for a second or two, and then taking out his

glass, he remained for several minutes intently surveying the great road to Hollitsch.

In this direction at once, every eye was turned, but nothing could we see. The road led through a wide open country for some miles, and at last disappeared in the recesses of a dark pine wood, that covered the horizon for miles on either side. Meanwhile Napoleon, with his hands clasped behind his back, walked hurriedly backwards and forwards, beside the blazing fires, stopping at intervals to look along the road, and then resuming his walk as before. He was not more than two hundred paces from where we stood, and I could mark well his gesture of impatience, as he closed his glass each time, after looking in vain towards Hollitsch.

"I say, Burke," whispered one of my brother officers beside me, "I should not fancy being the man who keeps him waiting in that fashion. Look at Berthier, how he keeps aloof; he knows that something is brewing."

"What can it all mean?" said I. "Who can he be expecting here?"

"They say now," whispered my companion, "that Davoust cannot hold the bridge of Göding, and must fall back before the Russian column; and that Napoleon has invited Alexander to a conference here, to gain time, to reinforce Davoust?"

"Exactly—but the Czar is too wily an enemy for that to succeed, and probably hence the delay, which appears to irritate him now."

The supposition, more plausible than most of those I heard before, was still contradicted by the account of the Emperor Alexander's retreat; and again was I at a loss to reconcile these discrepancies, when I beheld Napoleon, with his glass to his eye, motion with his hand for Berthier to come forward. I turned towards the road, and now could distinguish in the distance a dark object moving towards us. A few minutes after, the sun shone out, and I remarked the glitter of arms, stretching in a long line, while my companion, with the aid of a glass, called out—

"I see them plainly—they are lancers; the escort are Hungarians, and there's a calêche, with four horses, in front."

The Emperor stood motionless, his arms folded on his breast, and his head a little leaned forward, exactly as I have seen him represented in so many pictures and statues—his eyes were thrown downwards, and as he stirred the blazing wood with his foot, one could easily perceive how intensely his mind was occupied with deep thought. The clattering sound of cavalry now turned my attention to another quarter, and I saw exactly in front of us, and about five hundred paces off, a regiment of Hungarian hussars and some squadrons of Hulans, drawn up. I had little time to mark their gorgeous equipment and splendid uniform, for already the calêche had drawn up at the road side, and Prince John, of Lichtenstein, descending, took off his chapeau, and offered his arm, to assist another to alight. Slowly and, as it seemed, with effort, a tall thin figure, in the white uniform of the Austrian guard, stepped from the carriage to the ground. The same instant the officers of the staff fell back, and I saw Napoleon advance, with open arms, to embrace

him. The Austrian Emperor, for it was Francis himself, seemed scarcely able to control the emotion he felt at this moment; and we could see that his head rested for several seconds on Napoleon's shoulder—and, what a moment must that have been! How deeply must the pride of the descendant of the Cæsars have felt the humiliation, which made him thus, a suppliant before one he deemed a mere Corsican adventurer. What a pang it must have cost his haughty spirit, as he uttered the words, "Mon frere!"

As they walked side by side towards the plateau, where the fires were lighted, it was easy to mark that Napoleon was the speaker, while Francis merely bowed from time to time, or made a gesture of seeming assent.

As the Emperor arrived at the place of conference, we fell back some fifty yards, and although the air was still and frosty, and the silence was perfect around, we could not catch a word on either side. After about an hour the conversation appeared to assume a tone of gaiety and good-humour, and we could hear the sovereigns laughing repeatedly.

The conference lasted for above two hours, when once more the Emperors embraced, and, as we thought, with more cordiality, and separated. The Emperor of Austria returning, accompanied by Prince Lichtenstein, while Napoleon stood for some minutes beside the fire, as if musing, and then, beckoning his staff to follow, he walked towards the high road.

Scarcely had the Austrian Emperor reached his carriage, when Savary, bare-headed and breathless, stood beside the door of it. He was the bearer of a message from Napoleon. The next moment the calêche started, accompanied by Savary, who with a single aide-de-camp took the road towards the Austrian head-quarters.

As Napoleon was about to mount his horse, I saw General D'Auvergne move forward towards him. A few words passed between them, and then the general riding up to where I stood, said, "Burke, you are to remain here, and if any orders arrive from General Savary, hasten with them to the head-quarters of his Majesty. In twelve hours you will be relieved." So saying, he galloped back to the imperial staff, and soon after the squadrons defiled into the road, the cortége dashed forward, and all that remained of that memorable scene was the dying embers of the fires, beside which the fate of Europe was decided.

The old mill of Hollitsch had been deserted, when the Austrian and Russian columns took up their position before Austerlitz. The miller and his household fled at the first news of the advance, and had not dared to return. It was a solitary spot at best—a wild heath, without shelter of any kind, stretched away for miles on all sides—but now, in its utter loneliness, it was the most miserable-looking place can be conceived. While, therefore, I contented myself with the hope that my stay there might not be long, I resolved to do what I could to render my quarters more comfortable. My first care was my horse, which I picquetted in the kitchen, where I was happy to find an abundant supply of firewood; my next was to explore the remainder of the

concern, in which I discovered traces of its having been already occupied by the allied troops—rude caricatures of the French army, in full "*deroute*," before terrible-looking dragoons, in Austrian and Russian uniforms, ornamented the walls in many parts; whole columns of French prisoners were depicted begging their lives from a single Austrian grenadier: and one figure, which, it could easily be discovered, was intended for Napoleon himself, was about to be hanged upon a tree, to the very marked satisfaction, as it would seem, of a group of Russian officers, who stood by, laughing. It is easy to smile at the ridicule of which fortune has thwarted the application—and so I amused myself a good while by contemplating these grotesque frescoes; but a more welcome sight still awaited me, in a small chamber at the top of the building, where, in large letters, written with chalk on the door, I read, "Rittmeister von Oxenhausen's quarters"—here, to my exceeding delight, I discovered a neatly furnished chamber, with a bed, sofa, and, better still, a table—on which the remains of the Rittmeister's supper yet stood: a goodly ham, the greater part of a capon, a loaf of wheaten bread, and an earthenware crock, with a lid of brass, containing about two bottles of Austrian red wine. This was a most agreeable surprise to me—a pleasant exchange for the meagre meal of bread and cheese I had but time to procure from a sergeant of my troop, at parting. It need not be supposed that I hesitated long about becoming the Rittmeister's successor—and so, I drew the chair to the table, and the table nearer to the fire—for, singularly enough, the embers of a wood fire still slumbered on the hearth. Having taken the keen edge off an appetite, the cold air had whetted to the sharpest, I began an inspection of my quarters—first having replenished the fire with some logs of wood.

The chamber was an octagon, with five windows in as many of the faces—a fire-place and two doors occupying the other three. One of the doors, that by which I entered, opened from the stairs—the other led into a granary, or something of that nature—at least, so I conjectured, from a heap of sacks which littered the floor, and filled one corner completely. As I could not discover any corn, I resolved on sharing my loaf with my horse, a meal every campaigning steed is well accustomed to make; and now, returning to my little chamber, I resumed my supper with all the satisfaction of one who felt that he had made his rounds of duty, and might enjoy repose.

As I knew the Chateau de Hollitsch, where the Emperor Francis held his quarters, was some six leagues distant, I guessed that General Savary was not likely to return from his mission before morning at very soonest; and so it behoved me to make my arrangements for passing the night where I was. Having then looked to my horse, for whose bedding I made free with some dozen of the corn-sacks in the granary, I brought up to my own quarters a supply of wood; and having fastened the door, and secured the windows as well as I was able, I lit my meerschaum, and lay down before the fire in as happy a frame of mind as need be. Indeed I began to fancy that fortune had done tormenting, and was now about to treat me more kindly. The notice

of the Emperor had relieved my heart of a load, which never ceased to press on it, and I could not help feeling that a fairer prospect was opening before me. It is true, time and misfortune had both blunted the ardour of enthusiasm with which I started in life—the daring aspirations after liberty—the high-souled desire for personal distinction, had subsided into calmer hopes and less ambitious yearnings. Young as I yet was, I experienced in myself that change of sentiment and feeling which comes upon other men later on in life, and I was gradually reconciling myself to that sense of duty which teaches a man well to play his part, in whatever station he may be called to act, rather than indulge in those overweening wishes for pre-eminence, which in their accomplishment are so often disappointing, and in their failure a source of regret and unhappiness. These feelings were impressed on me, more by the force of events than by any process of my own reasoning. The career in which I first started as a boy, had led to nothing but misfortune. The affection I conceived for one—the only one I ever loved—was destined equally to end unhappily. The passion for liberty, in which all my first aspirations were centred, had met the rude shocks, which my own convictions suggested; and I now perceived that I must begin life anew, endeavouring to forget the influences, whose shadows darkened my early days, and carve out my destiny in a very different path from what I once intended.

These were my last waking thoughts, as my head sank on my arm, and I fell into a deep sleep. The falling of a log from the fire awoke me suddenly. I rubbed my eyes, and for a second or two could not remember where I was. At length I became clearer in mind, and, looking at my watch, perceived it was but two o'clock. As the flame of the replenished fire threw its light through the room, I remarked that the door into the granary stood ajar. This struck me as strange. I thought I could remember shutting it before I went to sleep. Yes; I recollected perfectly placing a chair against it as the latch was bad, and a draught of cold air came in that way; and now the chair was pushed back into the room, and the door lay open. A vague feeling, half suspicion, half curiosity, kept me thinking of the circumstance, when, by chance—the merest chance—my eyes fell upon the table, where I had left my sabre and my pistols. What was my amazement to find that one of the latter—that which lay nearest the door—was missing? In an instant I was on my feet. Nothing can combat drowsiness like the sense of fear; and I became perfectly awake in a moment. Examining the room with caution, I found every thing in the same state as I had left it, save the door and the missing pistol. The granary alone, then, could be the shelter of the invader, whoever he might be. What was to be done? I was totally unprovided with light, save what the fire afforded, and even were it otherwise, I should expose myself by carrying one, long before I could hope to detect a concealed enemy. The best plan I could hit upon seemed to secure the door once more; and then placing myself in such a position as not to be commanded by it again, to wait for morning patiently. This, then, I did at once; and having examined my remaining pistol, and

found the charge and priming all safe, I drew my sabre, and sat down between the door and the window, but so that it should open against me.

Few sensations are more acutely painful than the exercise of the hearing, when pushed to intensity. The unceasing effort to catch the slightest sound, soon becomes fatigue; and as the organ grows weary, the mental anxiety grows more acute, and then begins a struggle between the failing sense and the excited brain. The spectral images of the eye, in fever, are not one half so terrible as the strange discordant tones that jar upon the tympanum in such a state as this. Each inanimate object seems endowed with its own power of voice, and whispering noises come stealing through the dead silence of midnight.

"In this state of almost frenzied anxiety I sat long—my eyes turned towards the door, which oftentimes I fancied I could perceive to move. At length the thought occurred to me, that by affecting sleep, if any one lay concealed within, whose object was to enter the room, this would probably induce him.

I had not long to wait for the success of my scheme. The long-drawn breathing of my seeming slumber was not continued for more than a few minutes, when I saw the door slowly, almost imperceptibly, move. At first it stirred inch by inch—then gradually it opened wider and wider till it met the obstacle of the chair. There now came a pause of several seconds, during which it demanded all my efforts to sustain my part—the throbbing at my throat and temples increasing almost beyond endurance, and the impulse to dash forward, and flinging wide the door, confront my enemy, being nearly too much for my resistance. Again it moved noiselessly as before—and then a hand stole out, and, laying hold of the chair, pushed it slowly backwards. The grey light of the breaking day fell upon the spot, and I could see that the cuff of the coat was laced with gold. This time my anxiety became intense. Another second or two and I should be engaged in the conflict—I knew not against how many. I clutched my sabre more fairly in my grasp, as my breathing grew thicker and shorter. The chair still continued to slide silently into the room, and already the arm of the man within protruded. Now was the moment, or never, and, with a spring, I threw myself on it, and, pinioning the wrist in my hands, held it down upon the floor while I opposed my weight against the door. Quick as lightning the other hand appeared, armed with a pistol, and I had but a moment to crouch my head nearly to the ground, when a bullet whizzed past and smashed through the window behind me—while, with a crash, the frail door gave way to a strong push, and a man sprang fiercely forward to seize me by the throat. Jumping backward I recovered my feet, but before I could raise my pistol he made a spring at me, and we both rolled together on the floor. On the pistol both our hands met, and the struggle was for the weapon. Twice was it pointed at my heart; but my hand held the lock, and not all his efforts could unclasp it. At last I freed my right hand from the sword-knot of my sabre, and, striking him with my clenched knuckles on the forehead, threw him back. His grasp

relaxed at the instant, and I wrenched the pistol from his fingers, and placed the muzzle against his chest. Another second and he would have rolled a corpse before me, when, to my horror and amazement, I saw in my antagonist my once friend, Henri de Beauvais. I flung the weapon from me, as I cried out, "De Beauvais forgive me—forgive me." A deathly paleness came over his features; his eyes grew glazed and filmy, and with a low groan, he fell fainting on the floor. I bathed his temples with water; I moistened his pale lips; I rubbed his clammy fingers; but it was long before he rallied, and when he did come to himself, and looked up, he closed his eyes again, as though the sight of me was worse than death itself.

"Come, Henri," said I, "a cup of wine, my friend! and you will be better presently. Thank God this has not ended as it might." He raised his eyes towards me, but with a look of proud and unforgiving sternness, while he uttered not a word.

"It is unfair to blame me, De Beauvais, for this," said I. "Once more I say forgive me.'

His lips moved, and some sounds came forth, but I could not hear the words.

"There, there," cried I, "it's past and over now. Here is my hand."

"You struck me with that hand," said he in a deep, distinct voice, as though every word came from the very bottom of his chest.

"And if I did, Henri, my own life was on the blow."

"Oh that you had taken mine with it!" said he, with a bitterness I can never forget. "I am the first of my name that ever received a blow. Would I were to be the last!"

"You forget, De Beauvais ——"

"No, sir, I forget nothing. Be assured, too, I never shall forget this night. With any other than yourself I should not despair of that atonement for an injury, which alone can wash out such a stain; but *you*—I know you well—*you* will not give me this."

"You are right, Beauvais—I will not," said I calmly. "Sorry am I that even an accident should have brought us into collision. It is a mischance I feel deeply, and shall for many a day."

"And I, sir," cried he, as starting up his eyes flashed with passion, and his cheek grew scarlet—"and I, sir—what are to be my feelings? Think you that because I am an exile and an outcast—forced by misfortune to wear the livery of one who is not my rightful sovereign, that my sense of personal honour is the less, and that the mark of an insult is not as bloodstained on my conscience as ever it was?"

"Nothing but passion could blind you to the fact, that there can be no insult where no intention could exist."

"Spare me your casuistry, sir," replied he, with an insolent wave of his hand, while he sank into a chair, and laid his head upon the table.

For an instant, my temper, provoked beyond endurance, was about to give way, when I perceived that a handkerchief was bound tightly around his leg above the knee, where a great stain of blood marked his

trouser. The thought of his being wounded banished every particle of resentment, and laying my hand on his shoulder, I said—

"De Beauvais, I know not one but yourself to whom I would three times say, forgive me; but we were friends once, when we were both happier! For the sake of him who is no more—poor Charles de Meudon——"

"A traitor, sir—a base traitor to the king of his fathers."

"This I will not endure," said I passionately; "No one shall dare—"

"Dare!"

"Ay, dare, sir—such was the word. To asperse the memory of one like him, is to dare that, which no man can with truth and honour."

"Come, sir, I'm ready," said Beauvais, rising, and pointing to the door—"*Sortons!*" No one who has not heard that one word pronounced by the lips of a Frenchman, can conceive how much of savage enmity and deadly purpose it implies. It is the challenge, which, if unaccepted, stamps cowardice for ever on the man who declines it; from that hour, all equality ceases between those whom a combat had placed on the same footing.

"*Sortons!*" The word rung in my ears, and tingled through my very heart, while a host of different impulses swayed me. Shame, sorrow, wounded pride, all struggling for the mastery; but, above them all, a better and a higher spirit—the firm resolve, come what would, to suffer no provocation Beauvais could offer, to make me stand opposite him as an enemy.

"What am I to think, sir?" said he, with a voice scarcely articulate from passion. "What am I to think of your hesitation—or why do you stand inactive here? Is it that you are meditating what new insult can be added to those you have heaped on me?"

"No, sir," I replied firmly; "so far from thinking of offence, I am but too, too sorry for the words I have already spoken. I should have remembered, and remembering, should have made allowance for the strength of partisan feelings, which have their origin in a noble but as I believe, a mistaken source."

"Indeed!" interrupted he, in mockery; "is it then come to this? Am I, a Frenchman born, to be lectured on my loyalty and allegiance by a foreign mercenary!"

"Not even that taunt, Beauvais, shall avail you any thing; I am firm in my resolve."

"*Par Dieu!* then," cried he with savage energy, "there remains but this."—As he spoke, he leaped from his chair, and sprung towards me. In so doing, however, his knee struck the table, and with a groan of agony he reeled back and fell upon the floor, while from his re-opened wound a torrent of blood gushed out and deluged the room.

For a second or two he motioned me away with his hand; but as his weakness increased, he lay passive and unresisting, and suffered me to arrest the bleeding by such means as I was able to practise.

It was a long time ere I could stanch the gaping orifice, which had

been inflicted by a sabre, and cut clean through the high boot, and deep into the thigh. Fortunately for his recovery, he had himself succeeded in getting off the boot before, and the wound lay open to my surgical skill. Lifting him cautiously in my arms, I laid him on the bed, and moistened his lips with a little wine. Still the debility continued; no signs of returning strength were there, but his features, pale and fallen, were glazed with a cold sweat that hung in heavy drops upon his brow and forehead. Never was agony like mine. I saw his life was ebbing fast; the respiration was growing fainter and more irregular; his pulse could scarce be felt; yet dare I not leave my post to seek for assistance. A hundred thoughts whirled through my puzzled brain, and, among the rest, the self-accusing one, that I was the cause of his death. Yes, thought I, better far to have stood before his pistol, at all the hazard of my life, than see him thus.

In an instant all his angry speeches and his insulting gestures were forgotten. He looked so like what I once knew him, that my mind was wandering back again to former scenes and times, and all resentment was lost in the flood of memory.

Poor fellow—what a sad destiny was his; fighting against the arms of his country—a mourner over the triumphs of his native land. Alien that I was, this pang at least was spared me. As these thoughts crossed my mind, I felt him press my hand. Overjoyed, I knelt down and whispered some words in his ear.

"No, no," muttered he in a low plaintive tone; "not all lost—not all; La Vendée yet remains." He was dreaming.

CHAPTER LII.

THE ARMISTICE.

As I sat thus watching with steadfast gaze the features of the sleeping man, I heard the clattering of a horse's hoofs on the pavement beneath, and the next moment the heavy step of some one ascending the stairs. Suddenly the door was flung wide open, and an officer in the handsome uniform of the Austrian Imperial Guard, entered.

"Excuse this scant ceremony, Monsieur," said he, bowing with much courtesy, "but I almost despaired of finding you out. I come from Hollitsch with despatches for your Emperor; they are most pressing, as I believe this note will inform you.

While I threw my eye over the few lines addressed by General Savary to the officer in waiting at Hollitsch, and commanding the utmost speed in forwarding the despatch that accompanied them, the officer drew near the bed where De Beauvais was lying.

"*Mere de ciel*, it is the count!" cried he, starting back with astonishment.

"Yes," said I, interrupting him; "I found him here on my arrival; he is badly wounded, and should be removed at once. How can this be done?"

"Easily. I'll despatch my orderly at once to Hollitsch, and remain here till he return."

"But if our troops advance?"

"No, no; we're all safe on that score—the armistice is signed. The very despatch in your hands, I believe, concludes the treaty."

This warned me that I was delaying too long the important duty entrusted to me, and with a hurried entreaty to the Austrian not to leave De Beauvais, I hastened down the stairs, and proceeded to saddle for the road.

"One word, Monsieur," said the officer, as I was in the act of mounting. "May I ask the name of him to whom my brother-officers owe the life of a comrade much beloved?"

"My name is Burke—and yours, Monsieur?"

"Berghausen, chef d'escadron of the Imperial Guard. If ever you should come to Vienna"—but I lost the words that followed, as, spurring my horse to a gallop, I set out towards the head-quarters of the Emperor.

As I rode forward, my eyes were ever anxiously bent in the direction of our camp, not knowing at what moment I might see the advance of a column along the road, and dreading lest, before the despatches should reach the Emperor's house, the advanced vedettes should capture the little party at Hollitsch. At no period of his career was Napoleon

more incensed against the adherents of the Bourbons; and if De Beauvais should fall into his hands, I was well aware that nothing could save him. The Emperor always connected in his mind, and with good reason too, the machinations of the royalists with the plans of the English government. He knew that the land which afforded the asylum to their king, was the refuge of the others also; and many of the heaviest denunciations against the "perfide Albion," had no other source than the dread of which he could never divest himself, that the legitimate monarch would one day be restored to France.

While such were Napoleon's feelings, the death of the Duc D'Enghien had heightened the hatred of the Bourbonists to a pitch little short of madness. My own unhappy experience made me more than ever fearful of being in any way implicated with the members of this party, and I rode on, as though life itself depended on my reaching the imperial head-quarters some few minutes earlier.

As I approached the camp, I was overjoyed to find that no movement was in contemplation. The men were engaged in cleaning their arms and accoutrements, restoring the broken wagons and gun-carriages, and repairing, as far as might be, the disorders of the day of battle. The officers stood in groups here and there, chatting at their ease, while the only men under arms were the new conscripts just arrived from France—a force of some thousands—brought by forced marches from the banks of the Rhine.

The crowd of officers near the head quarters of the Emperor, pressed closely about me as I descended from my horse, eager to learn what information I brought from Hollitsch, for they were not aware that I had been stationed nearly half-way on the road.

"Well, Burke," said General D'Auvergne, as he drew his arm within mine, "your coming has been anxiously looked for this morning. I trust the despatches you carry may, if not contradict, at least, explain what has occurred."

"Is this the officer from Hollitsch?" said the aide-de-camp of the Emperor, coming hurriedly forward. "The despatch, sir," cried he, and the next moment hastened to the little hut, which Napoleon occupied as his bivouac. The only other person in the open space where I stood, was an officer of the lancers, whose splashed and travel-stained dress seemed to say he had been employed like myself.

"I fancy, Monsieur," said he bowing, "that you have had a sharp ride also this morning. I have just arrived from Göding—four leagues—in less than an hour, and, with all that, too late, I believe, to remedy what has occurred."

"What then has happened?"

"Davoust has been tricked into an armistice, and suffered the Russians to pass the bridge. The Emperor Alexander has taken advantage of the negociations with Austria, and got his army clear through—so, at least, it would seem—I saw Napoleon tear the despatch into fragments, and stamp his foot upon them—but here he comes."

The words were scarcely spoken when the Emperor came rapidly up,

followed by his staff. He wore a grey surtout, trimmed with dark fur, and had his hands clasped within the cuffs of the coat. His face was pale as death, and, save a slight contraction of his brows, there was nothing to show any appearance of displeasure.

"Who brought the despatch from Göding?"

"I did, sire," said the officer.

"How are the roads, sir?"

"Much cut up, and in one place a torrent has carried away part of a bridge."

"I knew it. I knew it," said he bitterly; "it is too late. Duroc," cried he, while the words seemed to come forth with a hissing sound, "did I not tell you, '*Grattez le Russe, et vous trouverez le Tartare!*'"

The words were graven in my memory from that hour; even yet, I can recall the very accents as when I heard them.

"And you, sir," said he, turning suddenly towards me, "you came from General Savary. Return to him with this letter. Have you written, Duroc? Well, you'll deliver this to General Savary at Hollitsch—he may require you to proceed to Göding—are you well mounted?"

"Yes, sire."

"Come, then, sir; I made you a captain yesterday; let us see if you can win your spurs to-day."

From the time I received the despatch, to that in which I was in the saddle, not more than five minutes elapsed. The idea of being chosen by the Emperor himself for a service, was a proud one, and I resolved to acquit myself with credit. With what concert does one's heart beat to the free stride of a mettled charger; how does each bold plunge warm the blood and stir up the spirits; and as, careering free over hill and valley, we pass in our flight the clouds that drift above, how does the sense of freedom, realized as it is, impart a feeling of ecstasy to our minds—our thoughts, revelling on the wayward liberty our course suggests, rise free and untrammelled from the doubts and cares of every-day life. Onward I went, and soon the old mill came in sight, rearing its ruined head amid the black desolation of the plain. I could not resist the impulse to see what had become of Beauvais, and leading my horse into the kitchen, I hastened up the stairs, and through the rooms; but all were deserted; the little chamber lay open—the granary too—but no one was there.

With a mind relieved, in a great measure, from anxiety, I remounted and continued my way; and soon entered the dark woods of Hollitsch. The chateau and demesne of Hollitsch were a private estate of the Emperor Francis, and once formed a favourite resort of Joseph the Second, in his hunting excursions. The chateau itself was a large irregular mass of building; but still, with all its incongruity of architecture, not devoid of picturesque effect; and the older portion of it was even handsome. While I stood in front of a long terrace, on which several windows opened from a gallery that ran along one side of the chateau, I was somewhat surprised that no guard was to be seen, nor even a single sentinel on duty. I dismounted, and leading

my horse, appoached the avenue that led up between a double range of statues to the door. An old man, dressed in the slouched hat and light blue jacket of a Bohemian peasant, was busily engaged in wrapping matting around some shrubs, to protect them from the frost. A little boy—his second-self in costume—stood beside him, with his pruning-knife, and stared at me with a kind of stupid wonder as I approached. With some difficulty I made out from the old man, that the Emperor occupied a smaller building called the Kaiser-Lust, about half a league distant in the forest, having given strict orders that no one was to approach the chateau nor its immediate grounds. It was his favourite retreat, and, perhaps, he did not wish it should be associated in his mind with a period of such misfortune. The old peasant continued his occupation while he spoke, never lifting his head from his work, and seeming all absorbed in the necessity of what he was engaged in. As I inquired the nearest road to the imperial quarters, he employed me to assist him for a moment in his task, by holding one end of the matting, with which he was now about to envelope a marble statue of Maria Theresa.

I could not refuse a request so naturally proffered, and while I did so, a little wicket opened at a short distance off, and a tall man, in a grey surtout and a plain cocked-hat without a feather, came forward; he held a riding-whip in his hand, and seemed, from his splashed equipment, to have just descended from the saddle.

"Well, Fritz," said he, "I hope the frost has done us no mischief?"

The old gardener turned round at the words, and, touching his hat respectfully, continued his work, while he replied, "No, Mein Herr, it was but a white hoar, and every thing has escaped well."

"And whom have you got here for an assistant, may I ask?" said he, pointing to me, whom he now saw for the first time. As the question was asked in German, although I understood it, I left the reply to the gardener.

"God knows," said the old fellow in a tone of easy indifference; "I think he must be a soldier of some sort."

The other smiled at the remark, and turning towards me, said in French—"You are, perhaps, unaware, sir, being a stranger, that it is the Emperor of Austria's desire, this chateau should not be intruded on."

"My offending, sir," interrupted I, "was purely accidental. I am the bearer of despatches for General Savary; and, having stopped to inquire from this honest man——"

"The General has taken his departure for Göding," he broke in, without paying further attention to my explanation.

"For Göding; and may I ask, what distance that may be?"

"Scarcely a league, if you can hit upon the right path; the road lies yonder, where you see that dead fir-tree."

"I thank you, sir," said I, touching my hat; "and must now ask my friend here to release me—my orders are of moment."

"You may find some difficulty in the wood, after all," said he; "I'll send my groom part of the way with you."

Before I could proffer my thanks suitably for such an unexpected politeness, he had disappeared in the garden through which he entered a few minutes before.

"I say, my worthy friend, tell me the name of that gentleman—he's one of the Emperor's staff, if I mistake not. I'm certain I've seen the face before."

"If you had," said the old fellow, laughing, "you could scarcely forget him—old Frantzerl is just the same these twenty years."

"Whom did you say?"

Before he could reply, the other was at my side.

"Now, sir," said he, "he will conduct you to the high road. I wish you a good journey."

These words were uttered in a tone somewhat more haughty than his previous ones; and contenting myself with a civil acknowledgment of his attention, I bowed and returned to my horse, which the little peasant child had been holding.

"This way, Monsieur," said the groom, who, dressed in a plain dark brown livery, was mounted on a horse of great size and symmetry.

As he spoke, he dashed forward at a gallop, which all my efforts could not succeed in overtaking. In less than ten minutes, the man halted, and waiting till I came up, he pointed to a gentle acclivity before me, across which the high road led.

"There lies the road, sir; continue your speed, and in twenty minutes you reach Göding."

"One word," said I, drawing forth my purse as I spoke; "one word. Tell me, who is your master?"

The groom smiled, slightly touched his hat, and, without uttering a word, wheeled round his horse, and, before I could repeat my question, was far on his road back to the chateau.

Before me lay the river, and the little bridge of Göding, across which now the Russian columns were marching in rapid but compact order. Their cavalry had nearly all passed, and was drawn with some field-guns along the bank; while, at half-cannon-shot distance, the corps of Davoust were drawn up in order of battle, and standing spectators of the scene. On an eminence of the field, a splendid staff were assembled, accompanied by a troop of Tartar horsemen, whose gay colours, and strange equipment were a remarkable feature of the picture; and here I learned, that the Emperor Alexander then was, accompanied by General Savary.

As I drew near, my French uniform caught the eye of the latter, and he cantered forward to meet me. Tearing open the despatch with eagerness, he rapidly perused the few lines it contained; then seizing me by the arm, in his strong grasp he exclaimed—

"Look yonder, sir; you see their columns extending to Serritz. Go back and tell his Majesty; but no—my own mission here is ended. You may return to Austerlitz."

So saying he rode back to the group around Emperor, where I saw him a few minutes after addressing his majesty, and then, after a formal leave-taking, turned his horse's head and set out towards Brunn.

As I retraced my steps towards the camp, I began to muse over the events which had just occurred; and even by the imperfect glimpses I could catch of the negociations, could perceive that the Czar had out-manœuvred Napoleon. It is true, I was not aware by what means the success had been obtained, nor was it for many a year after that I became cognizant of the few autograph lines by which Alexander induced Davoust to suspend his operations, under the pretence that the Austrian armistice included the Russian army. It was an unworthy act, and ill-befitting one, whose high personal courage and chivalrous bearing gave promise of better things.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE "COMPAGNIE D'ELITE."

With whatever triumphant feelings the Emperor Napoleon may have witnessed the glorious termination of this brief campaign, to the young officers of the army it brought any thing rather than satisfaction; and the news of the armistice was received in the camp with gloom and discontent.

The brilliant action at Elchingen, and the great victory at Austerlitz, were hailed as a glorious presage of future successes, for which the high-sounding phrases of a bulletin were deemed but a poor requital. A great proportion of the army were new levies, who had not seen service, and felt proportionably desirous for opportunities of distinction; and to them the promise of a triumphant return to France was a miserable exchange for those battle-fields on which they dreamed they should win honour and fame, and from whence they hoped to date their rise of fortune. Little did we guess, that while words of peace and avowals of moderation were on his lips, Napoleon was at that very moment meditating on the opening of that great campaign, which, beginning at Jena, was to end in the most bloody and long-sustained of all his wars.

Nothing, however, was now talked of but the fêtes which awaited us on our return to Paris, while liberal grants of money were made to all the wounded; and no effort was spared which should mark that feeling of the Emperor's, which so conspicuously opened his bulletin, in the emphatic words—"Soldiers, I am content with you."

Napoleon well understood, and indeed appeared to have anticipated, the disappointment the army would experience, at this sudden cessation of hostilities, and endeavoured now to divert the torrent of their enthusiasm into another and a safer channel. The bulk of the army were

cantoned around Brunn and Olmutz; some picked regiments were recalled to Vienna, where the Emperor was soon expected to establish his head-quarters, while many of those who had suffered most severely from forced marches and fatigues, were formed into corps of escort, to accompany the Russian prisoners—sixteen thousand in number—on their way to France; and lastly, a "*Compagnie d'elite*," as it was called, was selected to carry to the senate the glorious spoils of victory —forty-five standards, taken on the field of Austerlitz, and now destined to grace the Palace of the Luxembourg.

I had scarcely seated myself to the humble supper of my bivouac, when an orderly came to command me to General d'Auvergne's quarters. The little sitting-room he occupied, in a peasant hut, was so filled with officers, that it was some time before I could approach him; and my impatience was not lessened, by more than once hearing my name mentioned aloud, a circumstance not a little trying to a young man in the presence of his superiors in station.

"But here he is," said the General, beckoning to me to come forward. "Burke, his Majesty has most graciously permitted me to include your name in the *Compagnie d'elite*, a testimony of his satisfaction you've every reason to be proud of; and just at the moment I was about to communicate the fact to you, I have received a message from Marshal Murat, requesting that I may permit you to serve on his own staff——"

"Yes, Captain," said an officer in the uniform of a colonel—it was the first time I had been addressed by my new title, and I cannot express what a thrill of pleasure the word gave me—"Marshal Murat witnessed with pleasure the alacrity and steadiness of your conduct on the 2nd, and has sent me with an offer which I fancy few officers would not deem a flattering one."

"Unquestionably it is, Colonel," said General d'Auvergne. "Nay, more I will say, I regard it as the making of a young man's fortune, thus early in his career to have attracted such high notice; but I must be passive here—Captain Burke shall decide for himself."

"In that case, sir, I shall cause you but little delay, if you will still permit me to serve on your own staff."

"But stay, my boy, do not be rash in this affair; I will not insult your better feeling, by dwelling on the little power I possess, and the very great enjoyed by Marshal Murat, of serving your interests; but I must say, that with him, and on his personal staff, opportunities of distinction——"

"And here, I must interpose," said the Colonel, smiling courteously: "with no officer of this army can a man expect to see service, in its boldest and most heroic colours, rather than with General d'Auvergne."

"I know it—I feel it, too, and with him, if he will allow me——"

"Enough, my dear boy," said the old man, grasping my hand in his. "Colonel, you must explain to the marshal how stands this matter; and he is too kind of heart, and too noble of soul, to think the worse of any of us for our obstinacy; and now, my young friend, make your arrangements to join the *compagnie d'elite*—they march to-morrow

afternoon, and this is a service you cannot decline. Leave me to make your acknowledgments to the Marshal, and lose no more time here."

Short as had been my absence from my quarters, when I re-entered, I descried Tascher seated at the table, and busily employed in discussing the last fragments of my supper. "You see, my dear friend," said he, speaking with his mouth full, "you see what it is to have a '*salmi*' for supper. I sat eating a confounded mess of black bread, and blacker veal, for fifteen minutes, when the breeze brought me the odour of your delicious 'plat.' It was in vain I summoned all my virtue to resist it; if there ever was a dish made to seduce a subaltern on service, it is this; but I say, won't you eat something?"

"I fear not," said I, half angrily.

"And why?" replied he. "See what a capital wing that is—a little bare, to be sure—and there's the back of a pigeon. *Ma foi!*—you've no reason to complain. I say—is it true you are named among the '*Compagnie d'elite?*'"

I nodded, and eat on.

"*Diable!* There never was such fortune. What a glorious exchange for this confounded swamp, with its everlasting drill, from morning to night, shivering under arms for four hours, and shaking with the ague the rest of the day after—marching, mid-leg in water, half frozen, and trying quick movements, when the very blood is in icicles; and then you'll be enjoying Paris—delightful Paris—dining at, the "Rocher," supping at, the "Cadran," lounging into the salons, at the very time we shall be hiding ourselves amidst the straw of our bivouacs. I go mad to think of it; and what's worse than all—there you sit, as little elated, as if the whole thing were only the most natural in the world. I believe, on my word, you'd not condescend to be surprised, if you were gazetted Maréchal de France, in to-morrow's gazette."

"When I can bear, without testifying too much astonishment, to see my supper eaten by the man who does nothing but rate me into the bargain, perhaps I may plume myself on some equanimity of temper."

"Confound your equanimity. It's very easy to be satisfied, when one has every thing his own way."

"And so, Tascher, you deem me such a fortunate fellow."

"That I do," replied he, quickly: "you have had more good luck, and made less of it, than any one I ever knew. What a career you had before you when we met first. There was that pretty girl at the Tuileries, quite ready to fall in love with you. I know it, because she rather took an air of coldness with me. Well, you let her be carried off by an old general, with a white head and a queue—unquestionably a bit of pique on her part. Then, somehow or other, you contrived to pink the best swordsman of the army, little François there; and I never heard that the circumstance gained you a single conquest."

"Quite true, my friend," said I, laughing, "I confess it all; and what is far worse—I acknowledge that until this moment I did not even know the advantages I was wilfully wasting."

"And even now," continued he, not minding my interruption—"even now, you are about to return to Paris, as one of the '*elite.*'

Well, I'll wager twenty Naps that the only civil speeches you'll hear, will be from some musty old senators at the Luxembourg. Oh, dear! if my amiable aunt, the Empress, would only induce my most benevolent uncle, the Emperor, to put me on that same list, depend upon it you'd hear of Lieutenant Tascher in the 'Faubourg St. Honoré.'"

"But you seem to forget," said I, half piqued at last by the impertinence of his tone, "that I have neither friends nor acquaintances—that although a Frenchman by service, I am not so by birth."

"And I—what am I?" interrupted he—"a Creole, come from heaven knows what far away place beyond seas—that there never was a man with more expensive tastes, and a smaller means to supply them—with worse prospects, and better connections;—in short, a kind of live antithesis; and yet, with all that, exchange places with me now, and see if, before a fortnight elapse, I have not more dinner invitations than any officer of the same grade within the Boulevards. Watch, if the prettiest girl at Paris is not at my side in the opera. But here comes your official appointment—I take it." As he said this, an orderly of the "Garde" delivered a sealed packet into my hands, which on opening, I discovered was a letter from General Duroc, wherein I read, "that it was the wish of his Majesty, Emperor, and King, that I, his well-beloved Thomas Burke, in conformity with certain instructions, to be afterwards made known to me, should proceed with the *Compagnie d'elite* to Paris, then and there——"

As I read thus far aloud, Tascher interrupted me, snatching the paper from my hands, and continued thus—"Then, and there, to mope, muse, and be *ennuyée*, until such time as active service may again recall him to the army. My dear Burke, I am really sorry for you—wars and campaigning may be, indeed they are, very fine things, but as the means, not the end. His majesty, my uncle—whom may heaven preserve, and soften his heart to his relations—loves them for their own sake; but we, you and I, for instance, what possible reason can we have for risking our bones, and getting our flesh mangled, save the hope of promotion—and to what end that same promotion, if not for a wider sphere of pleasure and enjoyment? Think what a career a colonel, at our age, would have in Paris."

"Come, Tascher, I will not believe you in all this. If there were not something higher to reward one for the fatigues and dangers of a campaign, than the mere sensual delights you allude to, I, for one, would soon doff the epaulettes."

"You are impracticable," said he, half angrily; "but it is as much from the isolation in which you have lived, as any conviction on the subject. You must let me introduce you to some relatives of mine in Paris, they will be delighted to know you—for, as one of the *Compagnié d'elite*, you might figure as a very respectable "*Lion*" for two, nay, three, entire evenings—and you will have the *entrée* to the pleasantest house in Paris—they receive every evening—and all the best people resort there. I only exact one condition.

"And that is——"

"You must not make love to Pauline. That you will fall in love

with her, yourself, is a fact I can't help—nor you either. But no advance on your part—promise me that."

"In such case, Tascher, it were best for all parties I should not know the lady. I have no fancy, believe me, for being smitten, whether I will or no."

"I see, Master Burke, there is a bit of impertinence in all this—you sneer at my warnings about '*la belle cousine.*' Now, I am determined you shall see her at least; besides, you must do me a service with the countess. I have had the bad luck to be for some time out of favour with my aunt Josephine—some trumpery debts of mine they made a work about at the Tuileries. Well, perhaps you could persuade Madame de Lacostellerie to take up my cause—she has great influence with the Empress, and can make her do what she pleases; and if I must confess it, it was this brought me over to your quarters to-night—and I eat your supper, just to pass away time till you came back again. You'll not refuse me."

"Certainly not; but reflect for a moment, Tascher, and you will see that no man was ever less intended for a diplomate. It is only a few minutes since you laughed at my solitary habits, and hermit propensities."

"I've thought of all that, Burke, and am not a whit discouraged—on the contrary, you are the more likely to think of my affairs, because you have none of your own—and I don't know any one but yourself I should fancy to meet Pauline frequently, and on terms of intimacy."

"This, at least, is not a compliment," said I, laughing.

He shrugged his shoulders, and threw up his eyebrows, with a French expression, as though to say, it can't be helped—and then continued—"And now remember, Burke, I count on you, get me out of this confounded place. I'd rather be back at Toulon again, if need be—and as I shall not see you again before you leave, farewell. I'll send the letter for the countess early to-morrow."

We shook hands warmly, and parted, he to return to his quarters, and I to sit down beside my fire, and muse over the events that had just occurred—and think of Tascher himself, whose character had never been so plainly exposed to me before.

If Beauvais, with his hot-headed impetuosity, his mad devotion to the cause of the Legitimists, was a type of the followers of the Bourbons—so, in all the easy indifference and quiet selfishness of his nature, was Tascher a specimen of another class of his countrymen; a class which, wrapped up in its own circle of egotistical enjoyments, believed Paris the only habitable spot of the whole globe. Without any striking traits of character, or any very decided vices, they led a life of pleasure and amusement, rendering every one, and every thing around them, so far as they were able, subservient to their own plans and wishes—and perfectly unconscious, the while, how glaring their selfishness had become—and how palpable, even to the least observant, was the self-indulgence they practised on every occasion. Without cleverness or tact enough to conceal their failings, they believed they imposed on others, because they imposed on themselves—just as the child deems himself unseen, when he closes his eyes.

Josephine's followers were, many of them, like this—and formed a striking contrast to the young men of the Napoleonite party, who, infatuated by the glorious successes of their chief, deemed the career of arms alone honourable. St. Cyr and the Polytechnique was the nursery of these; the principles instilled there, were perpetuated in after life—and however exaggerated their ideas of France and her destiny, their undoubted heroism and devotion, might well have palliated even heavier errors. It was in ruminating thus over the different characters of the few I had ever known intimately, that I came to think seriously on my own condition, which, for many a day before, I had rather avoided than sought to reflect on. I felt, as how many must have done, that the bond of a common country—the inborn patriotism of the native of the soil—is the great resource on which men fall back, when they devote themselves to the career of arms. That the alien's position, disguise it how he will, is that of the mere mercenary. How can he identify himself with interests, on which he is but half-informed; or feel attachment to a land, wherein he has neither hearth nor home? In the very glory he wins, he can scarce participate. In a word, his is a false position—which no events, nor accidents of fortune, can turn to good account—and he must rest satisfied with a life of isolation, and estrangement.

I felt how readily, if I had been a Frenchman born, I could have excused and palliated to my conscience many things which now were matter of reproach. Aggressive war had lost its horrors in the glory of enlarged dominion—the greatness of France, and the honour of her arms, had made me readily forget the miseries entailed on other nations by her lust of conquest. But I, the stranger, the alien, had no part in the inheritance of glory; and personal ambition, what means it, save to stand high amongst those we once looked up to as superiors? For me, there were no traditions of a childhood passed amid great names, revered and worshipped; no early teachings beside the paternal hearth of illustrious examples. And yet there was one, who, although lost to me for ever, before whose eyes I would gladly seem to hold a high place—yes! could I but think that she had not forgotten me, would hear my name with interest—or feel one throb of pleasure, if I were spoken of with honour—I asked no more.

"A letter, *Monsieur le Capitaine*," said my servant, as he deposited a package on my table. Supposing it was the epistle of which Tascher spoke, I paid but slight attention to it—when, by chance, I remarked it was in General D'Auvergne's hand-writing. I opened it at once, and read as follows:

"My dear Burke,

"No one ever set off for Paris without being troubled with commissions for his country friends, and you must not escape the ills of common humanity—happily for you, however, the debt is easily acquitted; I have neither undiscovered shades of silk to be matched, or impossible bargains to be effected. I shall simply beg of you to deliver with your own hand, the enclosed letter to its address

at the Tuileries—adding, if you think fit, the civil attentions of a visit.

"We shall both, in all likelihood, be much hurried when we meet to-morrow, for I also have received orders to march—so that I take the present opportunity to enclose you a check on Paris, for a trifle in advance of your pay—remembering too well, in my own aide-de-camp days, the dilatory habits of the war office, with new captains.

"Yours, ever dear Burke,

"D'AUVERGNE, Lieut.-General.

"Bivouac, 11 o'clock."

The letter of which he spoke had fallen on the table, where I now read the address—"*á Madame, la Comtesse D'Auvergne, née Comtesse de Meudon, dame d'honneur, à S. M. L'Imperatrice.*" As I read these lines, I felt my face grow burning hot—my cheeks flushed up—and I could scarcely have been more excited, were I actually in her presence, to whom the letter was destined. The poor general's kind note, his cheque for eight thousand francs, lay there—I forgot them both, and sat still, spelling over the letters of that name so woven in my destiny; I thought of the first night I had ever heard it—when a mere boy, I wept over her sorrows, and grieved for her whose fate was so soon to throw its shadow over my own. But, in a moment, all gave way before the one thought—I should see her again, speak to her, and hear her voice. It is true, she was the wife of another—but, as Marie de Meudon, our destinies were as wide apart; under no circumstances could she have been mine—nor did I ever dare to hope it. My love to her, for it was such, ardent and passionate—was more the devotion of some worshipper at a shrine, than an affection that sought return. The friendless soldier of fortune, poor, unknown, uncared for—how could he raise his thoughts to one, for whose hand the noblest and the bravest were suitors in vain? Yet, with all this—how my heart throbbed, to think that we should meet again. Nor was the thought less stirring that I felt—that even in the short interval of absence, I had won praise from him, for whom her admiration was equal to my own. With all the turmoil of my hopes and fears, I felt a rush of pleasure at my heart—and when I slept, it was to dream of happy days to come—and a future far brighter than the past.

My first thought, when morning broke, was to ride over to Reygern, to learn the fate of my wounded friends. On my way thither, I fell in with several officers, bound on a similar errand—for already the convent had become the great hospital, to which the sufferers were brought from every part of the camp. As we went along, I was much struck by the depression of spirit so remarkable every where—the battle over, all the martial enthusiasm seemed to have evaporated. Many grumbled at the tiresome prospect of a winter in country quarters, or cantoned in the field; some regretted the briefness of the campaign; while others again complained, that to return to France after so little of active service, would only expose them to ridicule from their companions, who had seen Italy and Egypt.

"Spare your sorrows on that score, my young friends," said a colonel, who listened patiently to the complaints around him. "We shall not see the dome of the Invalides for some time yet. Except the *Compagnie d'elite*, I fancy few of us will figure on the Boulevards."

"There again," cried another; "I never heard any thing so unfair as that *Compagnie d'elite*—they have been, with two solitary exceptions, taken from the cavalry. Austerlitz was to be the day of honour for the infantry of France, said the bulletin."

"And so it was," interrupted a little dark-eyed major; "and I suppose his majesty thought we had enough of it on the field, and did not wish to surfeit us with glory. But I ask pardon," said he, turning towards me, "monsieur is, if I mistake not, named one of the *elite*."

As I replied in the affirmative, I observed all eyes turned towards me, but not with any kindly expression, far from it. I saw that there was a deliberate canvass of me, as though to see by my outward man, how I could possibly deserve such a favour.

"Can you explain to us, monsieur," said the little major to me, "on what principle the *elite* were chosen? for we have a thousand contradictory reports in the camp—some say, by ballot—some, that it was only those who never soiled their jackets in the affair of the other day, and looked fresh and smart."

A burst of laughter from the rest interrupted the major's speech—for its impertinence was quite sufficient to secure it many admirers.

"I believe, sir," said I, angrily, "I can show you some reasons against the selection of certain persons." As I got thus far, an officer whispered something into the major's ear, who, with a roar of laughing, exclaimed, "A thousand pardons; ten thousand, *parbleu;* I didn't know you."

"It was Monsieur pinked Francois, the *maitre d'armes*—yes, yes; don't deny it," said he—as I made no reply whatever to a question I believed quite irrelevant to the occasion. "Don't deny it—that lunge over the guard was a thing to be proud of; and by Jove, you shall not practise it at my expense."

This speech excited great amusement among the party, who seemed to coincide perfectly with the reasoning of the speaker; while I myself remained silent, unable to decide whether I ought to be annoyed, or the reverse.

"Come, Monsieur," resumed the major, addressing me with courtesy, "I ask pardon for the liberty of my speech; by St. Denis, if all the *Compagnie d'elite* have the same skill of fence, I'll not question their appointment." The candour of the avowal was too much for my gravity, and I now joined in the mirth of his companions.

If I have mentioned so trivial an incident as this here, it is because I wish to mark, even thus passingly, a trait of French military life. The singular confession of a man, who regretted his impertinence because he discovered his adversary was a better swordsman, would, under any other code, or in any other country, have argued poltroonery. Not so here; no one for a moment suspected his comrade's courage—nor could any circumstance arise to make it doubtful, save

an actual instance of cowardice. The inequality of the combat was reason enough for not engaging in it. The odds were unfair, because duelling was like a game, where each party was to have an equal chance, and hence no shame was felt at declining a contest, where this inequality existed.

Such a system, it is obvious, could not have prevailed in communities where duelling was only resorted to in extreme cases; but here it was an every day occurrence, and often formed but a brief interval, scarce interrupting the current of an old friendship. Any resentful spirit, any long-continued dislike to the party with whom you once fought, would have been denounced as unofficer-like and ungenerous; and every day saw men walking arm in arm, in closest intimacy, who, but the morning before, stood opposed to each other's weapons.

I now perceived the truth of what Minette had once said, and which, at the time, I but imperfectly comprehended. "Maitre Francois will be less troublesome in future, and you, Lieutenant, will have an easier life also."

"Halt there!" shouted a sentry, as we approached the narrow causeway that led up to the convent. We now discovered that, by a general order, no one was permitted to approach the hospital, save such as were provided with a leave from the medical staff. A bulletin of the deaths was daily published on the guard-house, except which no other information was afforded of the condition of the wounded; and to this we turned eagerly, and with anxious hearts, lest we might read the name of some friend, lost for ever. I ran over, with a rapid glance, the list, where neither St. Hilaire, nor poor Pioche occurred, and then setting spurs to my horse, hurried back to my quarters at the top of my speed. When I arrived, the preparations for the departure of the *elite* were already in progress, and I had but time to make my few arrangements for the road, when the order came to join my comrades.

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